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U.S. and Peking Join in Tracking Missiles in Soviet

Station in China Replaces Iranian Post Lost in '79

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WASHINGTON, June 17 — The United States and China are jointly operating an electronic intelligence-gathering station in China to monitor Soviet missile tests, according to senior American officials.

The facility was opened last year in a remote, mountainous region of the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region in western China, near the Soviet border. Two Soviet missile-testing bases are at Leninsk, near the Aral Sea, and at Sary-Shagan, near Lake Balkhash.

The establishment of the listening post involved a far deeper level of military cooperation between Washington and Peking than either Government had publicly acknowledged.

Sensitive Military Relationship

In Peking yesterday, at the conclusion of talks with Chinese leaders, Secretary of State Alexander M. Haig Jr. announced that the United States had decided in principle to sell arms to China. The United States had previously sold China only nonlethal military equipment.

Operation of the facility, which was not mentioned by Mr. Haig, brought the two nations into a sensitive, secret military relationship during the Carter Administration.

Officials said the post has filled a "critical" vacuum created when similar stations in Iran were abandoned during the Iranian revolution two years ago. They described the facility as one of Washington's most sensitive and important intelligence operations.

Shared by the Two Nations

Intelligence collected by the station is shared by the United States and China, officials said. The facility is furnished with American equipment and is manned by Chinese technicians. Advisers from the Central Intelligence Agency periodically visit the station.

American officials sought to keep the existence of the station secret, fearing that disclosure could adversely affect relations between the Soviet Union and the United States, and heighten tensions between the Soviet Union and China. In recent days, however, information about the operation has begun circulating openly here.

Soviet leaders, American officials said, are already seriously troubled by the growing relationship between Washington and Peking. They said the Soviet Union may already know about the facility but had not felt it necessary to respond because its presence was not a public embarrassment to them.

Anatoly F. Dobrynin, the Soviet Ambassador, in a meeting with American officials at the State Department today, condemned United States plans to lift restrictions on the sale of arms to China.

Disclosure of the monitoring post, officials here said, could also unsettle internal affairs in China, where moderate leaders may be vulnerable to charges that they made secret deals with the United States.

Surveys for Two Sites Made

According to information pieced together from officials in the last eight months, the idea to set up listening posts in China was first proposed to the Peking Government in 1978, before the establishment of diplomatic relations. Initially, the Chinese were reluctant to agree, apparently concerned about cooperating too closely with the United States.

The idea was pressed again after the overthrow of Shah Mohammed Riza Pahlavi in January 1979. This time, officials said, the Chinese agreed, provided the facilities were manned by Chinese technicians and built and operated in secret.

Surveys for two facilities were made. The Chinese eventually agreed to permit only one, officials said.

The site in western China is close to ideal, officials said, because it allows monitoring of Soviet missile tests from launch through flight over Siberia to dis-

persion of warheads. It does not permit monitoring of the final stages of flight, including the re-entry of the warheads.

The monitoring of missile tests is critical to the verification of Soviet compliance with key provisions of strategic arms agreements. It permits the United States, for example, to detect whether new missiles are being developed.

The performance characteristics of missiles are detected in a number of ways, including tracing the missile with radar and monitoring data transmitted by radio signals.

Typically, the United States would be seeking to determine the number of warheads the missile being tested can carry, its range, and the accuracy of re-entry vehicles that carry the warheads. Analysis of the information can show whether the missile is a new or old model or a variant.